

Russian Rapper Oxxxymiron Stages Anti-War Rallying Cry From Istanbul

By [Samantha Berkhead](#)

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ISTANBUL – One of Russia’s biggest rappers performed a sold-out charity concert Tuesday in a show of Russians’ opposition to their country’s war in Ukraine.

Some 400 Russians, many of whom fled to Turkey following the invasion, crowded into the basement club to watch Oxxxymiron perform a high-energy mix of old and new songs on a spartan stage with just the words “Russians against war” displayed behind him.

“I actually really like Oxxxymiron,” said Kostya, 31. “But even if we didn’t like him, we still would have come to this concert, because it looks like we’re seeing an important message and an important movement being born right now.”

“It’s very important when such a big, famous artist makes such a big statement. It’s not a half-step, it’s a radical step,” said Kostya’s girlfriend, Ksenia.

When Russia launched its devastating war on Ukraine late last month, the rapper — one of the only Russian artists who has vocally opposed the war — initially took a step back from the stage.

“I cannot entertain you when Russian missiles are falling on Ukraine,” Oxxxymiron, 37, [said](#) in an Instagram post announcing he was canceling his sold-out concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg, calling the invasion a “catastrophe and a crime.”

Soon after, he [announced](#) a series of charity concerts in cities where large numbers of Russians have fled since the outbreak of war, with the first date in Istanbul.

“There are tens of millions of Russians who categorically disagree with this war and I think this should be said as loudly as possible,” he said in the announcement.

He remarked that it would have been impossible to stage an anti-war concert within Russia due to the authorities banning the use of words like “war” and “invasion” to describe Moscow’s offensive.

“Total censorship has been implemented, and anyone who speaks out against the war in any way becomes a potential target for criminal prosecution,” he said.

All proceeds from the concert series, called “Russians Against War,” will be donated to NGOs helping the millions of Ukrainian refugees who have fled to Europe since Russia invaded.

The concerts will also be streamed on YouTube and Twitch, with an estimated 40,000 people watching Tuesday’s concert online.

Related article: [As Anti-War Russians Flee, Ex-Soviet Kyrgyzstan Prepares for Emigre Influx](#)

Tens of thousands of Russians have fled the country in the weeks since Moscow invaded Ukraine as the state [cracks down hard](#) on dissent and punishing sanctions [threaten](#) to upend the economy.

With travel to Europe severed by airspace bans and other options limited by Russian carriers halting international flights, Turkish Airlines remains one of the only air carriers connecting Russia to the outside world. Each day it brings many of these new emigres to the Turkish metropolis straddling Europe and Asia.

“We just arrived here one week ago because we don’t feel safe in Russia,” said Seva, 26, who was attending the concert with his girlfriend. “Maybe half of my friends have relocated to Georgia, Armenia and Turkey — IT specialists, people in creative professions, everyone who can work online are relocating.”

“We came out to support Oxxxymiron because we don’t support Putin’s regime at all,” Seva added.

Kostya and Ksenia came to Istanbul for the same reason.

“We don’t agree with the government’s position because of the war and the bombing of

Ukraine. We know some people who are there now,” said Ksenia.

“There’s also a sense that Russia is going to have a military dictatorship,” Kostya added.

Tuesday’s crowd at the Kadikoy Sahne club — located in Istanbul’s lively Kadikoy neighborhood on the Asian side of the city — was largely made up of young, urban Russians who overwhelmingly oppose the war.

Concert-goers launched into impassioned chants of “нет войне” (no to war) — and more vulgar equivalents — as they waited to enter the venue and during the concert.

Related article: [‘My Father Said I’m a Traitor Who Should Be Shot First’: War in Ukraine Splits Russian Families](#)

For most of the crowd Oxxxymiron was the draw, but some, like Elena, a Russian who has lived in Turkey for 21 years, had never listened to him. She simply came to show her support for Ukraine.

“I am glad that there are so many people tonight. My parents, my family, live in Russia and they support Putin, the regime. I’m against it and they’re for it,” said Elena, 45, who had the Russian and Ukrainian flags painted on her cheeks.

In between songs, Oxxxymiron urged concert-goers to speak frankly about the war to friends and family and urged them to get their information from sources outside Russian state media.

“Why do you think all our alternative media are being shut down? Why do you think Instagram, Facebook and others are being blocked? Maybe because [the authorities] don’t want you to have an alternative opinion,” he said. “I get videos and photos every day and they are not ‘fakes.’ They are not provided by the Ukrainian officials. These photos and stories come from my friends who are there right now – and who tell me that it’s completely f***ed up there. That’s why I ask you – not order, ask – to search for alternatives to the opinions you have already formed in your minds.”

“I understand that in all this modern chaos it’s hard to make out what’s true and what’s not. But I’m asking you to listen because it’s so f***ing important! Not just for Ukraine, but also for Russia. Otherwise, we will lose it,” he continued.

By the concert’s end, Oxxxymiron said more than \$30,000 had been raised to help Ukrainian refugees.

“This is the absolute least we can do,” he said.

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